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THE FÉSOLE CLUB PAPERS.

BY W. G. COLLINGWOOD.

X.—INFINITY.

IN common language we misuse the word *infinite*. The image it presents to our minds is that of a ladder, up which we toil step by step, only to find that another step is ever beyond us. That is not infinity; that is repetition. We *must* drop off some day; and *there* will be the end. And trying to read infinity into that image is indeed bewildering, because illogical; as absurd a state of mind as that of the legendary Irishman who, trying to unwind a tangle of twine, cried out in despair, "Faith, somebody must have cut the end of this string off!" If you would picture infinity, stand still, and draw round you a magic circle. There is a line which will have no end; its beginning is its end; it is a thing done for ever, complete; and well chosen as a symbol of the immovable, within which mystic isle you can stand secure from all the powers of darkness.

Again; in Time, what is our notion of eternity? Is it the ticking clock that never stops—hour after hour, year after year, millennium after millennium? But what then? Surely such a conception is not that of endlessness, but of periods defined and limited, differing only from the calendar of this life in the greater heart-sickness of hope deferred. A measure implies a limit; a limit implies an end. The end may be not yet; it may be out of sight; yet if it is implied there is no eternity, no infinity. But picture, if you can, the annihilation of Time; a state in which no one could say, "It takes me twenty minutes to walk a mile, or five minutes to run it, or one minute to steam it, or such and such a fraction of a second to telegraph it." A state in which your spirit is independent of a body, in which to think is to be, and to will is to do. That is Eternity; life freed from death in all its forms.

Observe that true infinity is not mere multiplicity of detail. It is not, "however much you learn, there is still something

more." That is only another way of saying that our powers of learning are poor. And when we apply what we have been discussing to the question of art, we ought to see in a moment the proper principles of detail in a composition, and the proper meaning of artistic infinity.

On hearing about it at first one might say, "That means I must put quantities of little things into my picture, and into each little thing I must put quantities more of little things, because that would be an approach to infinity." A double fallacy; for, first, it is not an *approach* to infinity that will do you the least good; you must either have infinity itself, or you have it not at all. And, secondly, have we not already seen that it lies, not in repetition, but in completion? That it is not the string with the end cut off, the Jacob's ladder; but the circle, the ring; not the wearied struggle of perpetual addition, but the repose of content.

But you may say, "How does this differ from unity?" In this way—that Unity is the dot, Infinity the circle. When Unity embraces Variety, when from the mere point without parts and magnitude it grows into the great harmonious whole, it then becomes the Infinite. In that process consists life. The moment that Unity is combined with Variety there is a living whole; and everything that expresses a living being, a whole, a soul, is an expression at the same time of what is rightly understood by the word Infinite.

Go and look out of window a minute; I am sure I am boring you with my metaphysics. It will not be long before the spring is here. We have some snowdrops, I think, and crocuses coming up. [This was written at first for a February lesson, and the reader must please imagine the north-country garden in early spring.] You notice that across the lawn the coppice looks not so wind-beaten and draggletail as it did a while ago. The twigs of oak seem standing on the tip-toe of expectation. It will not be long before they double their fists into buds and then fling out their hands into an ecstasy of spring foliage. Stand close to the window here. You remember how the rose tree on the wall flapped and scratched the panes through all the "drear-nighted December," till sometimes you were quite frightened; it seemed so like a ghost wanting to come in from the storm. How is it that now there is an alertness, a vigour, about the plant? You who

have learned to draw can see at a glance that there is life in its lines, no longer drooping, but switched up, spruce and springy, into quite a different curve. And if we try to draw the sort of curve they take, we find, as we have found before, that it is unlike a worm-wriggle or an end of thread; that it is a curve which constantly changes its direction, and yet, as you surmise, is under the control of some guiding principle. It is a line of life. It is what they call an infinite curve; infinite, not merely because it is always changing its direction, but because its perpetual variety is controlled and harmonised by unity of general direction, and vitality of action implied.

Now, when you come to draw, and to look at drawings, you will find that all possible lines may be thus expressive of life, or by hair's-breadth difference may be inert, lifeless. And those artists who have grasped the principle of infinite curvature make drawings that have a catch in them, a life about them, which can be explained by no talking, nor demonstrated by any measurement, and yet felt at once by the intelligent mind and experienced eye. That is one expression of infinity in art.

What curvature is to line, gradation is to tone and colour. Gradation in tone means light fading into dark: gradation in colour means green fading into grey or brown, and pink into russet, and so on. Like every other good thing, you can have too much of it; but gradation, far more than glitter, makes the light and life of natural effect.

Let us come to the window again, and look up at that film of cloud. I wish I could show you the sunset sky, clear and luminous from zenith to horizon, changing with every degree from deep purple blue, through rose, to golden of intense light. That indeed would teach the lesson, and exemplify infinity like nothing else. But we see too little of clear skies here; and yet there is infinity of gradation in every wreath, and wisp, and rag, and cushion of cloud.

From its darkest point of shade it lightens at first rapidly, and yet how tenderly! As your eye follows the tint, the gradation is retarded; light comes into the surface more and more slowly in this cloud we are looking at, until at last we arrive at its pitch of highest brightness, beyond which it fades again to the next edge of darkness, or to the brink of

the deep blue. Look again at the lawn. There are no sunstreaks on it now; and you might think at first that it was one flat tint of uniform green. And yet, when you examine it more closely, half shutting your eyes, you see that the green grows darker, changes both its tone and its colour, where on the other side the trees a little overshadow it. Just under the trees, how dark! Then from them spreads a soft bloom of tone, quite distinct at first; but as it comes toward you into the light, rapidly and more rapidly disappearing. There is gradation like this on every mass of foliage, on every leaf and blade of grass; how much more on that consummate expression of life, the subtle and mysterious modelling of the human figure! It is not only gradation that you must represent, it is *infinite* gradation; gradation varying in intensity with every step, and yet controlled in its variety by unity of direction; and gradation tender and delicate, for in nature sometimes you hardly know, till you look, that it is there at all. Now let us turn from nature to art. Here is a piece of sky that is one flat wash of cobalt; you were in too great a hurry to gradate it at all. Here is a cloud, done in two splashes of paint; a dark side and a light side; and somehow it does not look soft, and melting, and moving, and mysterious. Here is a tree in which you have tried hard to express what you thought to be infinity by laborious niggling of multitudinous leaves; but where are the springing lines of life in its branches? the play of varying light on the subtly modulated masses of its foliage? the Unity that should bind all its Variety into a living Infinity? In two minutes you might have suggested that, with a few dashing lines and a cleverly melting tint, if you had perfect command of your materials and the ready power of sympathetic observation which makes the difference between the real artist and other people; for the expression of Infinity is given easily if given at all. The very hand you work with is alive, and its natural impulse is to strike out lines that express life. That is why we find rapid and passionate sketching so pleasing, so lively, when it is done by a great artist.

But to attain to the power of such sketching, we cannot begin at once by dashing and scrawling away, on the supposition that *any* rapid work, with hands such as we have,

will produce infinite curves unerringly, and natural gradations. We must learn command of our material; we must train our eyes and we must accustom our hands first, at all costs, with labour and pains perhaps, to be faithful and true; and then one day we may hope to meet with the reward of our labours in living creations of vital art.

Of *Principality* we have spoken in a previous paper (No. 4)—how that you must have one chief thing in your picture, to which the rest is subordinate. We called it then the chief law, because if it be remembered the others suggest themselves without ado. Only be certain what you want to show as principal subject, and contrast and symmetry come without calling; unity is, though not the same thing, akin to principality; variety cries out for it, so that the eye may not wander about the picture seeking in vain for a resting-place.

In finding that resting-place you find *Repose*. Artistic repose, the repose of a good composition, does not mean dulness, emptiness, or the representation of people doing nothing; of lakes stagnant, and skies vacant. It means the satisfaction felt by the eye when it no longer roams about the picture distracted by one thing and another, when it no longer craves a light here and a dark there, a form more or less; because the whole arrangement is now in equilibrium—force balanced against force, and weight against weight; the details, various though they seemed, now united under a common headship. And to the whole, the expression of Infinity has given life. At last the labour of art ceases, for the work of art is done, and the test and token of its completion is *Repose*.

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Our first club year closed with this article, which set no new subject because the members were left free to draw whatever they liked as a competition for a prize. The drawings were required to be done within the month before the time fixed for sending in; otherwise there was no restriction on size, style, etc. A well-known artist, who had not read the articles, and had no leaning toward any of the somewhat peculiar ways and means inculcated in the Fésole club, was asked to judge the drawings. He gave the prize to the member who had taken highest monthly marks for carrying out the exercises in the Fésole club style; and the second in competition was second in monthly marks.

PLAYTIME.

BY LUCY H. YATES.

THE instinct of Play is strong in all young creatures,—one might indeed call it a “dominant idea” with both the human and the animal, but with the human it is almost equally an instinct to bring imagination into the play. And imagination has a wonderfully educative effect. If it is unwise to check imagination, it is disastrous to ridicule it, but this the unimaginative parent will generally strive to do. Children are not diminutive men and women; they live in a world of their own; if it is a world in which mistaken notions and ideals loom large, what matter?—they will all too soon fade into the light of common day. When disillusion comes the charm of the play is invariably gone.

An instance of this occurred the other day; a little girl was playing at draper's shop, her mother taking the part of purchaser. Partly with the idea of adding to the fun, and partly to tease the child, the mother made remarks of a ridiculous character, but the child saw no humour in the inconsistency. “You know you never speak like that in a shop, mother,” she said, and the whole attraction of the play vanished.

In the home at any rate it would be an advantage if we encouraged games that called out imagination, rather than such as call for active exertion. Children are many-sided beings, with undeveloped resources; they have not only arms and legs, eyes and ears, but senses of taste and touch, faculties of reasoning and speculating, of listening and criticising, all of which want bringing into use. To use a faculty is to obtain control of it, and as the aim in physical training is to gain freedom of movement and grace, so the sharpening-up of the faculties brings them under control and makes them ready for use.

Knowledge of the material world only reaches a child through the doors and windows of the senses, and according as his powers of perception increase so he is able to form correct judgments and add to his store of knowledge. There